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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000682

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SCIRI SIGNALS READINESS TO BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT PM;  
TALABANI TO CALL LEGISLATURE INTO SESSION WITHIN A WEEK.

REF: A. BAGHDAD 659

[B](#). BAGHDAD 593

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D).

[1](#). (S) SUMMARY: SCIRI Chief of Staff Haitham al-Husseini advised us March 4 of a party statement expressing commitment to the UIC 555 nomination of Jafari as PM, but indicating openness to discussions about who would be the best Prime Minister. PUK's Barham Salih welcomed the SCIRI statement and noted Moqtada Sadr's private indication to President Talabani of a readiness to be flexible about his support for Jafari. Salih said he had met March 4 with the Iranian Charge who had urged the Kurds not to interfere in the UIC 555 nomination of Jafari. Talabani announced at a March 4 press conference that the Council of Representatives (CoR) would hold its first session within one week. END SUMMARY

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SCIRI: OPEN TO DISCUSSION  
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[2](#). (C) On March 4, SCIRI Chief of Staff Haitham al-Husseini told PolOff that SCIRI's Advisory Committee issued a statement indicating that the Shia Coalition is still committed to its Prime Minister decision. However, taking into account the three letters received from outside parties rejecting Jafari's PM nomination (ref a), SCIRI indicated that it would be open to discussing who would be the best Prime Minister. The statement also expressed SCIRI's support for a "national front" that would support the government and fight terrorism.

[3](#). (C) An ebullient Minister of Planning Barham Salih (PUK), was delighted to learn from us March 4 late afternoon about the SCIRI communique. He highlighted the communique's reference to SCIRI's willingness to have a serious dialogue about finding the right prime minister as a sign that their support for incumbent PM Jafari was not ironclad. He also stressed the importance of the communique's reference to SCIRI joining a national front - presumably with other political parties from outside the List 555 group.

[4](#). (C) Salih and Talabani chief of staff Karadaghi both confirmed to us March 4 that hardline Shia cleric Moqtada as-Sadr, had called Talabani to talk about government formation. Salih said that Sadr (whose support for Jafari within 555 delivered the latter the Shia Coalition's PM nomination) hinted that he could be flexible about Jafari. Salih mused about how Sadr, a fugitive from the law two years ago, could be so openly a power broker in March 2006. Salih understood, meanwhile, that Ayatollah Sistani and the Najaf clerical establishment would push for unity of the List 555 group. He wondered how to take advantage of the animosities among SCIRI, Sadr and the Najaf clerics to undermine Jafari.

He said the question would be how to find a PM candidate that all could agree upon, whether a political figure or a technocrat. Salih (and Karadaghi) told us also that SCIRI contacts are telling them that the List 555 charter specifically states that any prime minister nominated by the bloc must enjoy the support of all the major parties. Thus, Salih concluded, there is plenty of room to negotiate about Jafari. With this in mind, he plans to visit Najaf on March 15.

15. (S) Salih said he had met earlier on March 4 with the Iranian charge and the Iranian culture attache (whom Salih described as the head of Iranian intel in Baghdad). The Iranians had urged the Kurds not to interfere in the List 555 nomination of Jafari. Salih concluded that the Iranians were backing multiple friends in Iraq - a modus operandi he said they had long played in Kurdistan. Salih commented with real amusement, however, that the Iranians seemed to understand they are not fully in control of the PM game now.

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Council of Representative to Sit By March 12  
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16. (C) President Talabani announced at a March 4 press conference that the Council of Representatives (CoR) would hold its first session within one week. Kamiran Karadaghi, Presidency Council's Chief of Staff, told PolOff March 4 that Talabani, Deputy President Adil Abd al-Mahdi, and TNA Speaker Hajim al-Hasani had discussed this matter earlier in the week and had agreed that the CoR must sit no later than March 12. Karadaghi stated that these three would meet again March 5 to formally decide on a date, and added that the CoR would probably sit before March 12.

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17. (C) It is still anticipated that the first session will be ceremonial and will adjourn until the political parties have agreed on who will occupy the main government positions. The Kurds have hinted that the National Salvation Front could theoretically threaten to elect a CoR Speaker as a bluff aimed at galvanizing government formation negotiations with the Shia Coalition. March 4 press reports Shahrستاني saying that Adnan Pachachi will chair the first session, however it is unclear whether he misspoke or is unaware that Abd al-Latif al-Bedri, also from Allawi's party, appears to be the oldest member (ref B).  
SATTERFIELD